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Toward a Holistic Understanding of ELL Children and Their Well-Being

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Focal Points for Today

- **Dissertation research:**
 - School Support, Parental Involvement, and Academic and Social-Emotional Outcomes for English Language Learners (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014)
- **Follow-up study:**
 - Native Language Background and Academic Achievement: Is Socioemotional Well-Being a Mediator? (Niehaus, Adelson, & Sejuit, in progress)

Statement of the Problem

- Children who are English Language Learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing segment of the school-aged population
- Limited proficiency in English, in combination with stressful environmental conditions, places them at risk for:
 - Academic failure (NAEP, 2009a, 2009b)
 - Social and emotional difficulties (Niehaus & Adelson, 2013; Spomer & Cowen, 2001)

Statement of the Problem

- The elementary school years are a critical period for establishing positive developmental trajectories for children
- The school and home environments are the primary environmental contexts where support is most needed (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001)

Purpose of the Study

To determine how support from the school environment and support from parents contribute to the academic and social-emotional development of ELL children in elementary school

Theoretical Foundations

- Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model
(Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner, 2005)
- The present study focuses on two particularly important developmental contexts for children
 - 1. Microsystem: Children's schools
 - 2. Mesosystem: The home-school connection

Schools as Microsystems

- Wide variability in ELL support services across schools (Zehler et al., 2003)
- Descriptive studies have identified many areas of concern in ELL education (Cosentino de Cohen, Deterding, & Clewell, 2005; Zehler et al., 2003)
- Little research has connected school-based practices to actual ELL student outcomes
 - Especially when considering comprehensive school support beyond specialized language instruction

The Home-School Mesosystem

- Parental involvement linked with positive academic and social-emotional outcomes (EI Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001)
- ELL families often face barriers that prevent them from being involved in their children's education (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008)
- Can school support for ELL families contribute to higher parental involvement and more positive student outcomes for ELLs?

Important Student Outcomes

- Majority of research with ELLs has focused on academic achievement (e.g., Han & Bridglall, 2009)
- However, students' self-beliefs and social-emotional wellbeing are also important correlates of educational **SUCCESS** (e.g., Jennings & DiPrete, 2010; Marsh & Martin, 2011)

Research Questions

1. Is a higher level of school support for ELL students and families associated with more positive academic and social-emotional outcomes at the student level?
2. Is the relationship between school support and ELL student outcomes mediated by parental school involvement?
3. How do ELL children's perceived academic and social-emotional skills relate to their academic achievement?

Participants

- Approximately 1,020 third-grade ELL students from ECLS-K
 - 87% Hispanic
 - 50% female
 - 97% attended public schools
- Language status identified at kindergarten entry by scores on the Oral Language Development Scale (Duncan & De Avila, 1998)

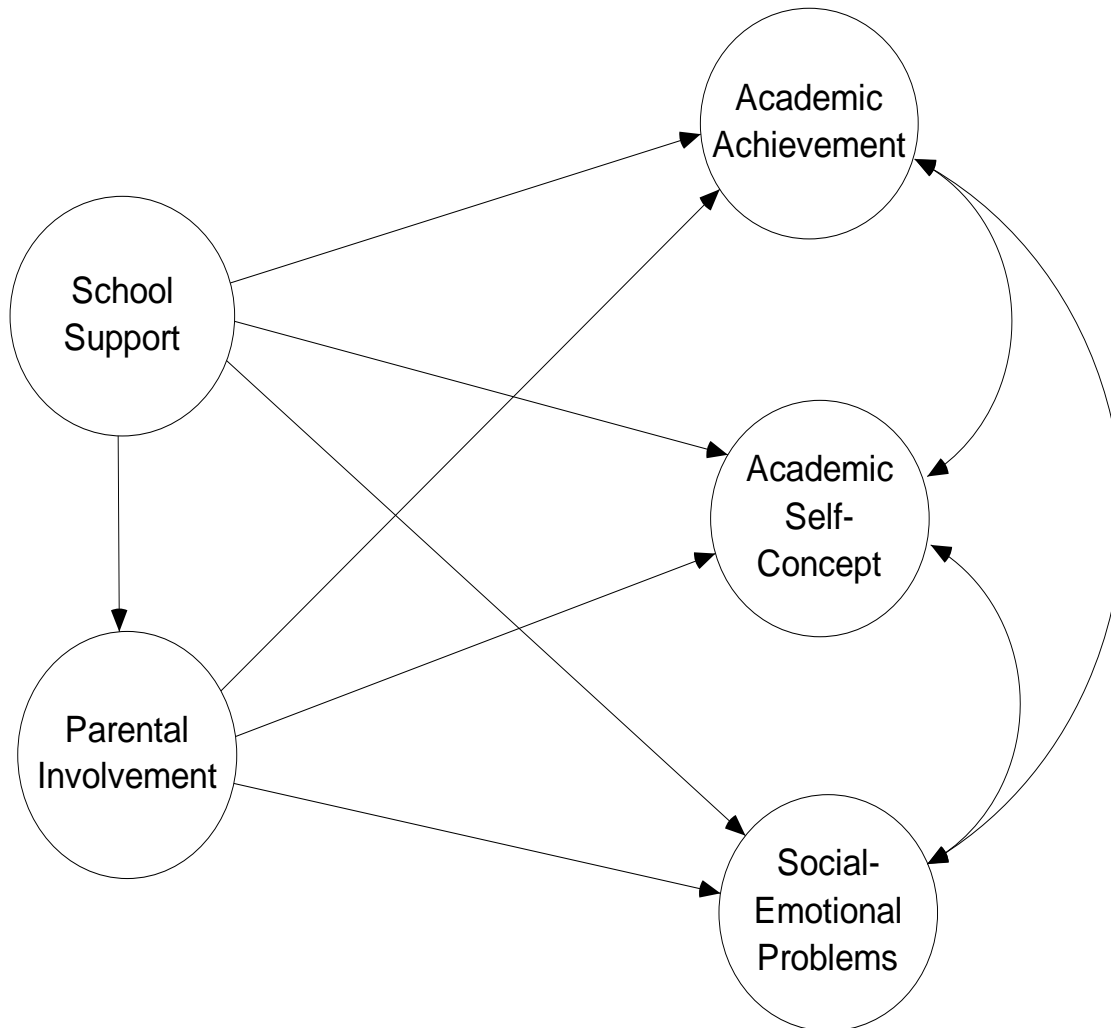
Measures

- Parent Interviews
- Teacher Surveys
- School Administrator Surveys
- Direct Child Assessment
 - Reading and Mathematics IRT scores
 - Adapted Self-Description Questionnaire-I (SDQ-I; Marsh, 1990)

Data Analyses

- All analyses were conducted using Mplus statistical software (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010)
- To account for missing data, multiple imputation was used to impute 10 datasets (Enders, 2010)
- Appropriate sampling weight and TYPE= COMPLEX analysis setting were used
- Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to build a hybrid model
- PRODCLIN program was used to test mediation paths (MacKinnon et al., 2007)

Structural Model



SCHOOL CONTROLS:
School Type, School Enrollment, School Title I, School Minority, School ELL

STUDENT CONTROLS:
Asian/Pacific Islander, Other Race, SES, Grade, Previous Achievement, Child ESL

MODEL FIT:
 $\chi^2(465) = 659.512$ ($p < .001$),
CFI = .943, RMSEA = .020

Important Findings

- Higher levels of school support predicted more parental involvement among ELL families
- More parental involvement was linked with fewer social-emotional concerns among ELLs
- ELL children with fewer social-emotional problems had significantly higher levels of achievement
- There were significant relationships between academic self-concept and achievement when examining domain-specific beliefs

Unexpected Findings

- ELL children had lower achievement and more social-emotional concerns when they attended schools with more support services
- Potential factors that may explain these results:
 - ▣ Difficulty of disentangling support services from school characteristics associated with low achievement
 - Possible confounding factors at the school level
 - ▣ Measurement of school support
 - ▣ Cross-sectional design of study

Implications and Future Research

- ▣ Schools should focus on fostering parental involvement among ELL families
 - This study provides tangible strategies

- ▣ More attention should be given to social-emotional concerns among ELL children
 - Future research should consider:
 - social-emotional concerns as a mediator of language status and achievement (UP NEXT!!!)
 - possible prevention and intervention strategies



Native Language Background and Academic Achievement: Is Socioemotional Well-Being a Mediator?

Background Information

- Growing evidence indicating that ELLs tend to report more socioemotional concerns at school as compared to their EP peers (Niehaus & Adelson, 2013)
- Research consistently shows that socioemotional difficulties are linked to lower achievement outcomes among the general school-aged population (e.g., Baker, 2006) and also among ELL children specifically (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014)

Background Information

- To date, however, no research has examined the role of socioemotional well-being as a mediator of the relationship between language status and achievement
- This topic is of particular importance for both policy and practice

Background Information

- Two major sources of variability to consider:
 - 1. Informant (student- vs. teacher-report)
 - 2. Native language background (Spanish-speaking ELLs and ELLs from Asian-language backgrounds are two largest groups)

Purpose of Study

Determine the extent to which socioemotional well-being mediated the relationship between language status and academic achievement, while exploring potential differences in this relationship based on informant and native language background

Participants

- Drawn from ECLS-K
- Data from third- and fifth-grade rounds
- Students identified as ELL or EP based on the primary home language that was listed in their school records
 - 6,981 EP students
 - 829 Spanish-speaking ELLs
 - 378 ELLs from Asian-language backgrounds

Measures

- Academic achievement: IRT scale scores in reading and mathematics
- Self-reported socioemotional well-being: Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ; adapted from Marsh, 1990)
- Teacher-reported socioemotional well-being: Social Rating Scale (SRS; adapted from Gresham & Elliott, 1990)

Data Analysis

- **Mplus statistical software** (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010)
- **Weighted Least Squares Estimation with Means and Variances** (WLSMV; accounts for categorical data)
- **TYPE=COMPLEX** analysis setting (accounts for the nested nature of the data)
- **C56CW0** sampling weight (accounts for the sampling design of the ECLS-K data)

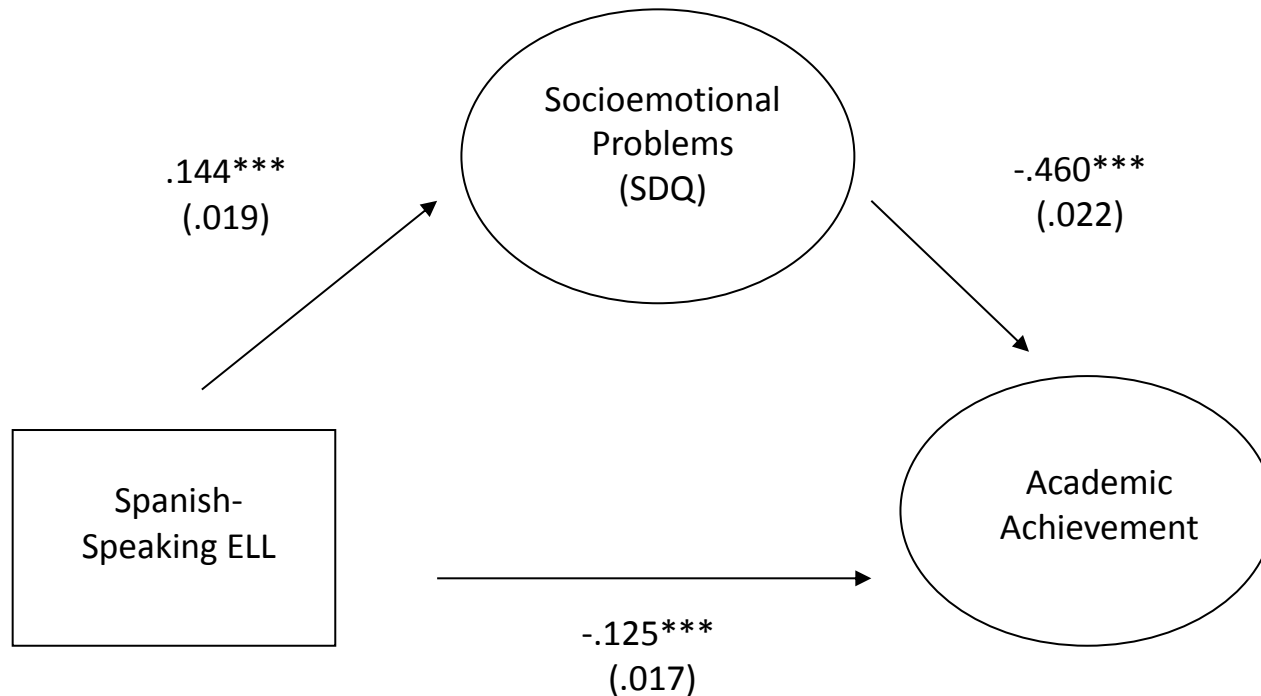
Data Analysis

- SEM used to test four models
 - Language Status was observed variable, Socioemotional Problems and Academic Achievement were latent factors
 - Control variables: Gender, SES, Previous Socioemotional Problems, Previous Academic Achievement

Data Analysis

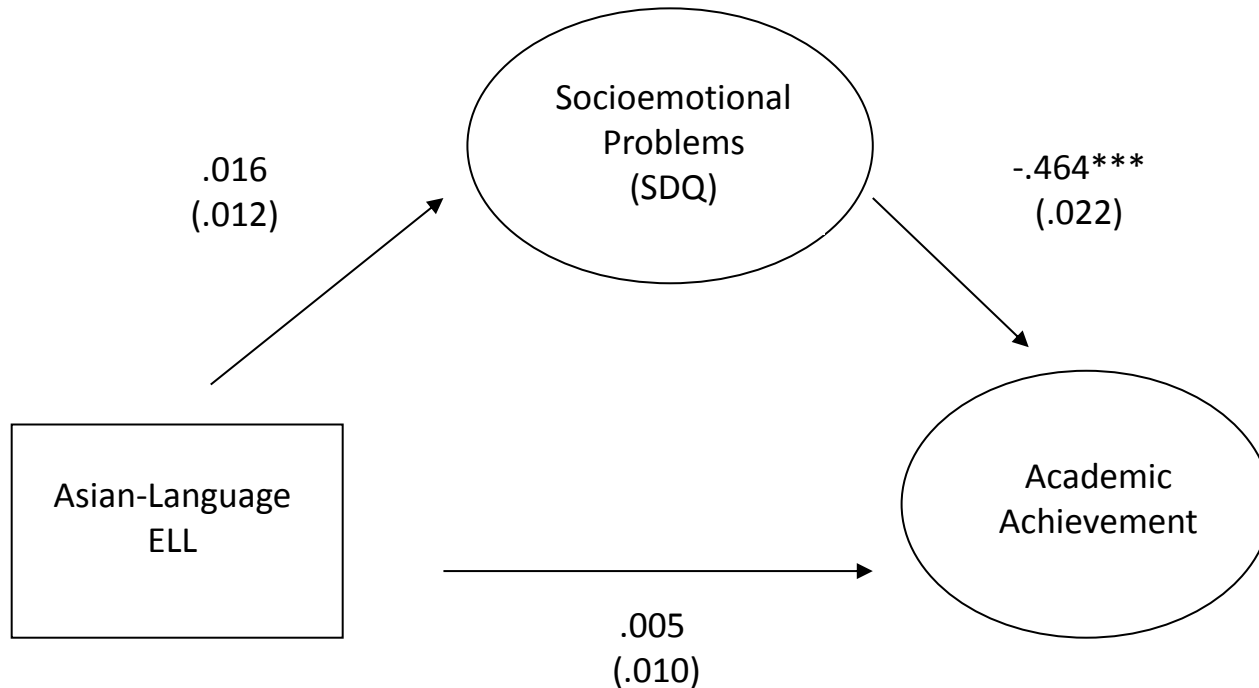
- Analyses proceeded in 3 steps
 - Established measurement model
 - Across 4 models, fit indices fell within the acceptable range: $\chi^2(42) = 412.749$ to 574.962 , $p < .001$; RMSEA = .034 to .040; CFI = .905 to .930
 - Added regression paths to build full structural model
 - Tested mediation paths

Model 1: Child-Report; Spanish-Speaking ELL



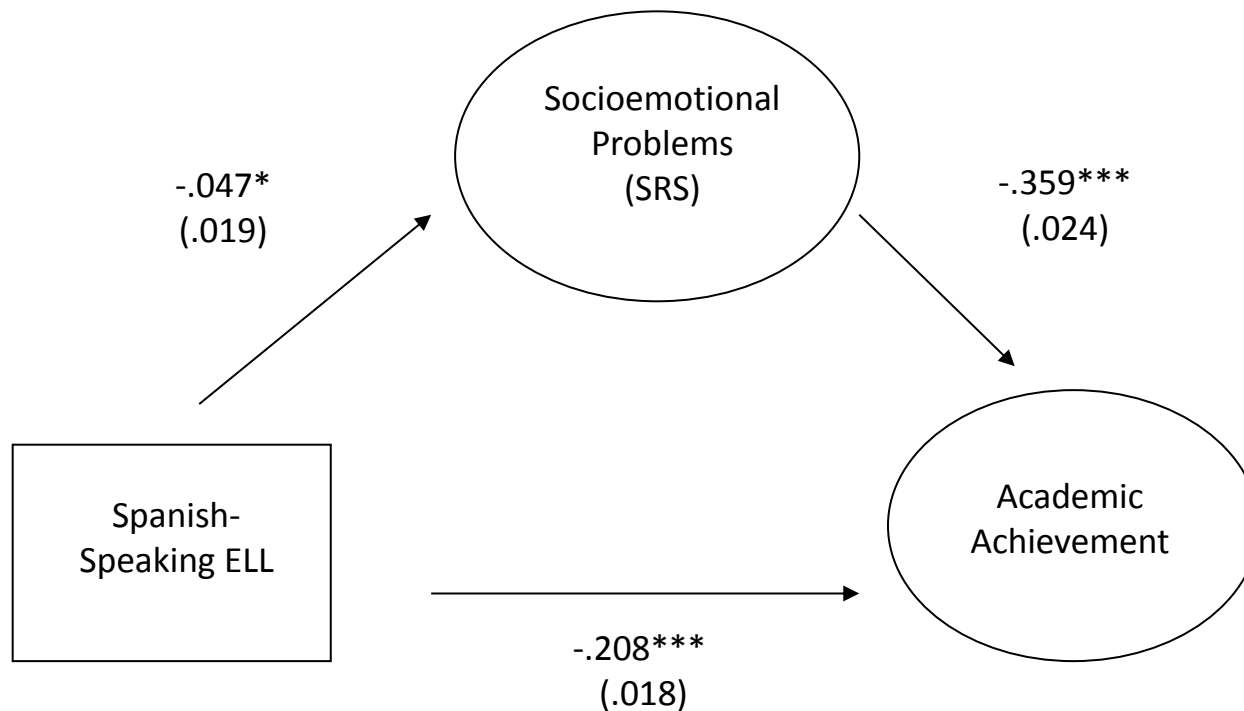
Significant indirect effect ($b = -.529$, $SE = .080$, 95% C.I. ranging from $-.691$ to $-.379$)

Model 2: Child-Report; Asian-Language ELL



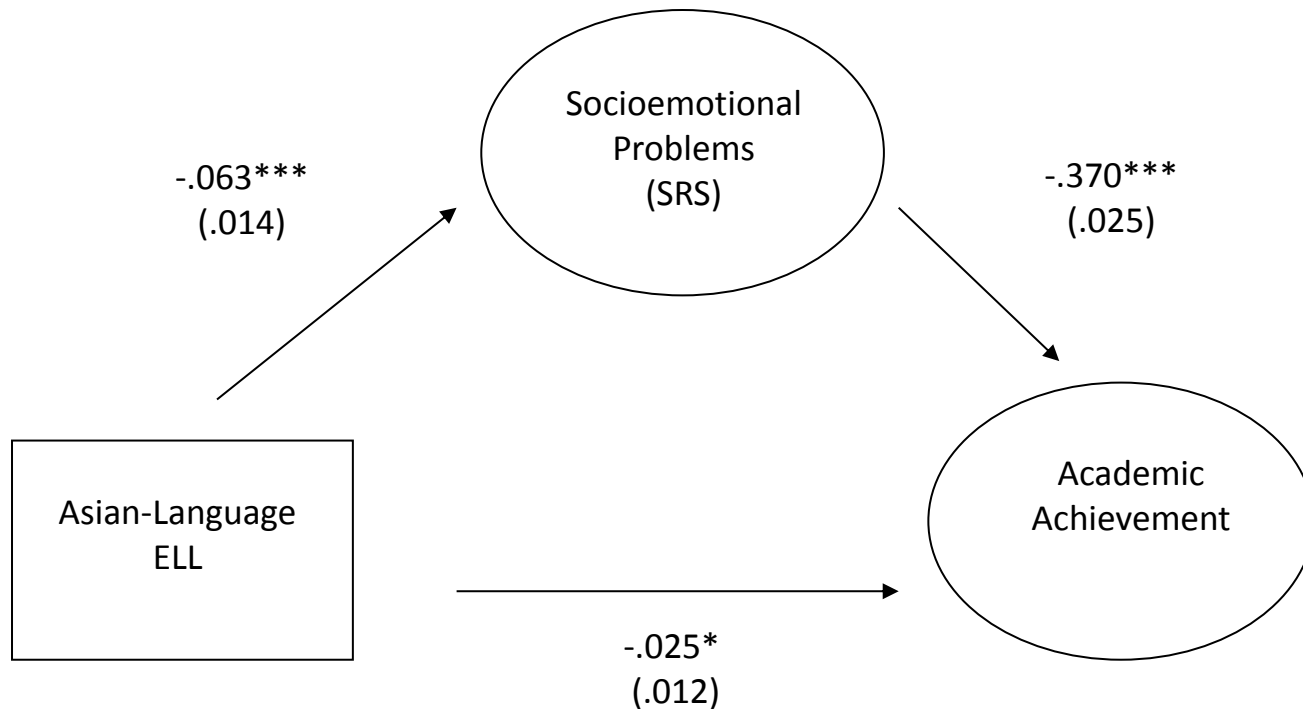
Non-significant indirect effect ($b = -.127$, $SE = .101$,
95% C.I. ranging from $-.327$ to $.069$)

Model 3: Teacher-Report; Spanish-Speaking ELL



Significant indirect effect ($b = .137$, $SE = .059$,
95% C.I. ranging from $.024$ to $.257$)

Model 4: Teacher-Report; Asian-Language ELL



Significant indirect effect ($b = .407$, $SE = .102$, 95% C.I. ranging from .216 to .615)

Findings

1. Increased socioemotional problems contributed to poorer academic performance regardless of native language background or whether student- or teacher-reports were used
 - Schools should promote socioemotional well-being for **all** students

Findings

2. Results differed when examining teacher-versus student-reports of socioemotional problems
 - For both Spanish-speaking ELLs and Asian-language ELLs, teachers perceived fewer social and emotional difficulties than the students themselves reported
 - Could explain competitive mediation pattern found when using teacher-reports

Findings

3. Results differed when considering Spanish-speaking ELLs versus Asian-language ELLs
 - Self-reported socioemotional problems partially mediated the relationship between language status and academic achievement for Spanish-speaking ELLs; however, this was not the case for Asian-language ELLs
 - Important to consider within-group variability

Where do we go from here?

- How do we promote socioemotional well-being for ELLs?
 - SEL programs, individual/group counseling, newcomer academies, specialized language instruction, etc.?
- What causes the mismatch between what ELLs and their teachers are reporting? How can we help teachers understand students' perspectives?
- Beyond these two language groups, what are other more nuanced sources of within-group variability we need to consider?

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